FACT SHEET **3 Character Education**

What is Character Education?

Character education is a national movement creating schools that foster ethical, responsible, and caring young people by modeling and teaching good character through emphasis on universal values that we all share. It is an intentional, proactive effort by schools to instill in their students important values such as caring, honesty, fairness, responsibility, and respect for self and others (Character Education Partnership). Parents are the primary moral educators of their children. An effective character education program in the schools supports the home by encouraging positive character development.

Is Character Education required in Virginia?

In 1999 the Virginia General Assembly amended The Code of Virginia to require character education instruction. The new section of the code states: Each school board shall establish, within its existing programs, a character education program in its schools. The purpose of the character education program shall be to instill in students civic virtues and personal character traits so as to improve the learning environment, promote student achievement, reduce disciplinary problems, and develop civic-minded students of high

character. The component of each program shall be developed in cooperation with the students, their parents, and the community at large. Classroom instruction may be used to supplement a character education program; however, each program shall be interwoven in the school procedures and environment and structure to instruct primarily through example, illustration, and participation, in such a way as to complement the Standards of Learning.

What does a comprehensive approach include?

Thomas Lickona in *Educating for Character (1991)* states there are 9 classroom strategies and 3 school-wide strategies for an effective comprehensive approach to character education.

1. *The teacher as caregiver, model, and ethical mentor:* Treating students with love and respect, encouraging right behavior, and correcting wrongful actions.
2. *A caring classroom community:* Training students to respect and care about each other.
3. *Moral discipline:* Using rules and consequences to develop moral reasoning, self-control, and generalized respect for others.
4. *A democratic classroom environment:* Using the class meeting to engage students in shared decision making and in taking responsibility for making the classroom the best it can be.
5. *Teaching values through the curriculum:* Using the ethically rich content of academic subjects as vehicles for values teaching.
6. *Cooperative learning:* Fostering students' ability to work with and appreciate others.
7. *The "conscience of craft":* developing students' sense of academic responsibility and the habit of doing their work well.
8. *Ethical reflection:* Developing the cognitive side of character through reading, research, writing, and discussion.
9. *Conflict resolution:* Teaching students how to solve conflicts.
10. *Caring beyond the classroom:* Using role models to inspire altruistic behavior and providing opportunities for school and community service.
11. *Creating a positive moral culture in the school:* Developing a caring school community that promotes the core values.

12.Parents and community as partners: Helping parents and the whole community join the schools in a cooperative effort to build good character.

How do you begin?

- Form a leadership group, including students, parents, teachers, counselors, and administrators.
- Develop a knowledge base: Study the *Eleven Principles of Effective Character Education* www.character.org or contact the Virginia Character Education Project (V-CEP) at the Department of Education's website www.pen.k12.va.us/VDOE/Instruction/CEP
- Look at your school's Mission Statement. Does it indicate the school's responsibility for promoting character development?
- Conduct a survey that gets input from staff, students, and parents. Use the data to discover areas of strength and weakness.
- Involve all staff (custodians, cafeteria workers, administrators, bus drivers, etc.) in a planning meeting. Brainstorm ways you currently promote character development and consider an additional approach.
- Identify target virtues for your program.
- Obtain feedback on how to focus the school's program.
- Design an action plan for implementation.
- Hold regular meetings to evaluate and reflect on progress

Taken from Thomas Lickona & the Center for the 4th and 5th R's